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AUTHOR Peck, Hugh I.
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ABSTRACT

The Basic Skills Testing program in Louisiana was implemented due to a legislative mandate for minimum competency testing. The program began in grade two, adding a grade each year through grade twelve. Basic Skills Tests are being phased in to replace State Assessment. State Assessment will continue in the areas of science, social studies, and other nonbasic skills areas. The Education Department developed statements of minimum standards in reading, mathematics, and writing in grades kindergarten through twelve. Curriculum guides were developed in all required subjects. A pupil progression plan was developed to assure mastery of minimum skills before promotion. The teacher preparation programs were coordinated on a statewide basis. The compensatory/remedial education law required the state to provide remediation for students who did not reach mastery on minimum standards. Parental awareness and involvement in the basic skills program has been encouraged by the distribution of a Calendar of Skills. Louisiana has implemented procedures to assure higher quality education in its public schools. There is an effort to prevent minimum standards from becoming maximum goals. (DWH)

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THE ROLE OF BASIC SKILLS TESTING IN LOUISIANA

Hugh I. Peck
Louisiana Department of Education

Introduction

It may seem redundant to write another paper or organize another symposium on minimum competency testing. Certainly, the issues surrounding MCT have been extensively explored, via professional journals and public media as well. I doubt if more than 20 hours of testimony have been heard on any other single issue in education in the manner of the MCT "trial" which delved into the pros and cons of this issue. Certainly, those who were recognized as experts in the field had a tremendous opportunity to get their views before the public in a unique way. The picture, however, must be viewed from another angle by the Louisiana Department of Education, where we have not only the joy and pleasure of entering into the debate, but also the reality of implementing a unique legislative mandate for MCT.

Politically--How We Got Where We Are.

First, however, it is necessary to review some of the politics and sociology of how such laws come about. The drive for public education to be accountable did not begin in Louisiana; nevertheless, the speed and extensiveness with which such a law was passed in Louisiana leave one with the inescapable conclusion that the voters of our state wanted legislation that assured accountability in our educational community. There is no doubt that the Louisiana Legislature, through the State Board and the Department, wanted to get education on the move in our state. The issues of graduates who cannot read, write or compute, of social promotion, of teachers who cannot or will not teach, and school

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administrators who cannot or will not administer were raised in our state as they were in others. Our public needed renewed faith in their public schools.

Prior to 1976, there was little or no curriculum direction from the Department to our LEAs. There were few, if any, educational standards or programs of quality control. The public and the Legislature wanted, and Superintendent J. Kelly Nix provided, the leadership to assure at least minimum educational standards were established throughout our state.

The response to the public's demand for quality education and quality assurance was the enactment of 15 major pieces of legislation in a six-year period. Thus, the Superintendent, the Board and the Department will be totally involved in its implementation over the next 10 years. (Figure 1 is a synopsis of the legislation affecting elementary and secondary education.) For the record, legislation relating to higher education, especially teacher preparation, was nearly as extensive but is not germane to the MCT issue.

Minimum Competency Testing--The Most Important Legislation

Three of these pieces of legislation are the foundation for our consideration of the psychometric and politic issues of minimum competency testing--the School Accountability Act (1977), the Competency Based Education Act (1979), and the Compensatory/Remedial Education Act (1980).

The accountability law directed the Department to establish minimum standards in the basic skills areas, a statewide assessment program, a program for personnel evaluation for employees of the SEA, and the LEAs (a law requiring monitoring of this program was enacted

FIGURE 1

SYNOPSIS OF LEGISLATION AFFECTING ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

STUDENT IMPROVEMENT

Minimum Competency Standards
Act No. 621 (R.S. 17:391.1-17:391.10)

As a first step to improvement of student performance, minimum competency standards were established to define skill areas in reading, writing and mathematics for grades K-12. Teams of teachers, principals and supervisors from across the state worked with State Department of Education personnel and university personnel to establish this all-important first step.

Curriculum Guides
Act No. 750 (R.S. 17:24.4)

Curriculum guides, based upon the skill areas defined in minimum competency standards, have been developed for all required subjects. To accomplish this task, more than 600 teachers, supervisors and university personnel contributed their skills. The curricula materials were field-tested in 44 school systems during the 1980-81 school year and will be used statewide in the 1981-82 school year.

State Assessment
Act No. 621 (R.S. 17:391.1-17:391.10)

Criterion-referenced tests, based upon skills identified in the minimum competency standards, were piloted and administered to grades 4, 8 and 11 in reading during the fall of 1977-78. During the 1978-79 school year tests were developed in mathematics, and in 1979-80 they were completed for writing. Now, educators and parents had one more tool to use in determining how well students were learning essential skills. For the first time in many years, we have a "match" between skills (minimum competency standards), teaching (curriculum guides) and testing programs.

In 1981, the State Assessment Program was modified to a grade 3, 7 and 10 spring testing cycle in order to allow teachers to have access to student's test results at an earlier time. This will aid the teacher by allowing more time for diagnostic/prescriptive teaching.

Basic Skills Testing
Act No. 750 (R.S. 17:24.4)

Beginning in the 1980-81 school year, a test was developed and piloted in basic skills for grade 2. Again, this test was based on the minimum competency standards in reading, writing and mathematics. In the spring of the 1981-82 school year this test will be used as the principal basis for a student's promotion to 3rd grade. Each year after the 1981-82 school year, we will add a grade level to the basic skills testing program, phasing out the 3, 7 and 10 program, until all grade levels are being tested each year.

Pupil Progression Plans
Act No. 750 (R.S. 17:24.4)

Each local school district has developed a Pupil Progression Plan which defines promotion standards from one grade level to the next.

Compensatory Education
Act No. 433 (R.S. 17:39.6-17:400)

The next logical question is what to do about students who do not achieve up to expectations. The answer has been the development of plans for compensatory (or remedial) education. Specifically, funds were used to support pilot, planning or demonstration projects in parish or city school systems. These projects will provide models for other systems to emulate in setting up their own compensatory programs.

Coordination and Involvement of All Federal Instructional Programs
Act No. 750 (R.S. 17:24.4)

Emphasis is being placed upon coordination of regular instructional programs with Title I, Title IV, Vocational Education and Special Education programs in order to provide a more effective total instructional program for all children.

An example of the way this coordination is being accomplished is through the PAAS Program, which was mandated in Act 621.

PERSONNEL IMPROVEMENT

Job Descriptions and Personnel Evaluation
Act No. 621 (R.S. 17:391.1-17:391.10)

Job descriptions have been written by each local school district and the State Department for all certificated personnel. Additionally, a uniform assessment program for all educational employees, including State Department of Education personnel and local school system employees, has been implemented.

Uniform Certification Standards
Act No. 16 (R.S. 17:7(6)(b))

On or after September 15, 1978, any person applying for initial certification must pass a proficiency examination. After validation by 522 subject matter experts, the National Teachers Examination was selected for use in Louisiana.

Professional Practices Commission
Act No. 236 (R.S. 17:1331-17:1342)

The duty of this Commission is to investigate any reasonable alleged grievances. While the Commission does not have direct authority over the issuance or suspension of licenses, it can recommend to the BESE that such action be taken. The Commission shall be composed of members who are certified to teach.

Professional Improvement Program
Act No. 207 (R.S. 17:3601-17:3661)

This program provides the mechanism by which educational employees in public elementary and secondary schools will have an opportunity for professional growth and improvement and, at the same time, enjoy significant salary increases.

Tuition Exemption Program for Teachers
Act No. 20 (R.S. 17:7.3)

Louisiana teachers may now attend public state colleges and universities on a tuition-exemption basis. Acts 718, 261 and 379 increased the scope of personnel who are eligible.

Paid In-Service Days
Act No. 10 (R.S. 17:24.1)

This program provides 2 days of salary-paid in-service training for educators. The training is based upon local needs and designed by teachers and principals on the district level.

Teacher Education Programs
Act No. 756 (R.S. 17:7.1)

In 1977 a law was passed to require a 2.2 grade point average for entrance and a 2.5 grade point average for completion of a teacher preparation program. Additionally, the law requires 6 hours of reading instruction for secondary majors and 9 hours for elementary majors. Student teaching time was increased from 90 clock hours to 270 clock hours.

Act No. 737 (R.S. 17:7.2)

Practical experiences in classroom situations are now required for students in teacher preparation programs. "In-school" experiences must begin at the sophomore level and include schools of varied socio-economic and cultural characteristics.

Accreditation (PAAS)—Program Assistance and Approval System

Act No. 621 (R.S. 17:391.1-17:391.10)

The goal of PAAS is to coordinate all monitoring activities into one on-site visitation that includes compliance activities of special education, vocational education, and Titles I and IV programs.

PAAS standards focus on aspects of both school and personnel improvement. These standards include being certain that districts are fully implementing the following:

1. Minimum Skills/Maximum Goals Standards
2. Curriculum Guides
3. Pupil Progression Plans
4. Personnel Evaluation Plans

the following year), a study of school efficiency and effectiveness and a program of school, program, and LEA accreditation. After reviewing many other state accountability plans, I am convinced that this is the most ambitious and extensive program of accountability that any state has undertaken.

The competency based education law passed in 1980 directed the Department to:

- coordinate all curriculum efforts state and federal, including regular, vocational and special education,
- develop curriculum guides in all required subjects,
- develop and establish a basic skills testing program beginning in grade two, adding a grade each year through grade twelve in 1992,
- direct and require of each LEA a pupil progression plan that assures mastery of minimum skills before promotion,
- provide remediation for students, and
- coordinate the programs of teacher preparation on a statewide basis.

The compensatory/remedial education law directs the state to provide remediation for those students who do not reach mastery on the minimum standards, to establish and evaluate 16 pilot programs in remediation (funded only one year) and, strangely enough, each year, to close down the five least effective LEA remediation programs. Those programs would be required to re-gear before being re-funded. The regular school year programs were to be funded through the minimum foundation formula, and the summer school through per-pupil allocations. Unfortunately, the impact of this legislation was weakened when funds for a second year of the remedial pilot projects were not forthcoming, and six to eight valuable demonstration centers to be selected from the 16 pilots could not be established. The rhythm of experiment, pilot, demonstrate, and implement was rudely interrupted.

FIGURE 2

MATHEMATICS

* Introduced
** Ongoing
*** Mastery

MINIMUM STANDARDS

WHOLE NUMBER OPERATIONS continued	GRADES										
	Read-iness	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
25. Add two four-digit numbers. (regrouping)					*	***					
26. Add two five-digit numbers. (regrouping)					*	***					
27. Add columns of numbers with five or less digits, five or less addends.							*	***			
28. Estimate a sum to the appropriate place value.						*	**	**	**	***	
29. Identify the parts of an addition problem.		*	**	***							
30. Demonstrate a knowledge of subtraction facts with minuends to ten.		*	***								
31. Subtract a one-digit number from a two-digit number (minuends to 18) using concrete objects.		*	**	***							
32. Subtract a one-digit number from a two-digit number (minuends to 18) using basic facts.		*	**	***							

Mandates for Change

The Department has the responsibility to respond to laws affecting education. This paper will specifically address legislation that affects the basic skills testing program.

Minimum Competency Standards

First, the Department, using extensive local educator participation, developed statements of minimum standards in reading, mathematics, and writing in grades K-12. Later, a statement of twelfth grade minimum competencies was established. Another paper will chronicle the development of those standards. The standards established at what level a skill was to be introduced, reinforced, and mastered within the K-12 program. Figure 2 illustrates the format of those standards.

State Assessment Program

Louisiana has two separate testing programs mandated by different pieces of legislation. The State Assessment Program was developed first with tests in reading (1978), mathematics (1979), and writing (1980) being administered in grades 4, 8 and 11 through the 1981-82 school year. Items for this fall assessment program were developed directly from the mastery level of the previous year's skill statements. Because of a need to provide more time for diagnostic-prescriptive teaching, the decision was made to move the State Assessment from a fall cycle to a spring testing cycle beginning in 1981. Another important reason for the move from fall to spring testing was to more easily phase in our second testing program, the Basic Skills Test.

Experience Counts

It is necessary to point out that prior to entering into our second legislated test, the Basic Skills Testing program, the Department already had extensive testing experience. Not only had we learned a great deal about criterion-referenced test development based upon Louisiana competencies, but also we had gained valuable insight into the logistics of large-scale testing. We had learned how to successfully bring together certified, experienced teachers and Department staff, together with ETS consultants, in a manner that provided quality control over our item writing efforts. (Another paper in this symposium will chronicle our item development process.) Further, we had learned how to manage enormous amounts of paperwork and how to develop an efficient reporting system.

Basic Skills Testing

Armed with these skills, we developed a Basic Skills Testing program by writing items in language arts and mathematics, based upon the second grade competency standards. The test was piloted in the spring of 1981 and will be given to all second graders in our state in the spring of 1982. The second grade Basic Skills Test will become the principal criterion for promotion. Naturally, this test has aroused a great deal of interest among parents and educators.

Curriculum Guides

The next logical step in creating a "match" between our skills standards and our testing programs was the creation of curriculum guides in required subject areas. The development, piloting, evaluation, and implementation of these guides is another chronicle related to our basic skills testing program, but not necessary to this

series. The purpose was to assure that the instructional program was in place before the basic skills testing began. Such an effort is not only sound educationally; it is a legal necessity. Another major purpose was to assure that minimum standards did not become maximum goals. Figure 3 is a page illustrating the format and content of those guides. The synchronization of standards, curriculum, and testing is basic to our program.

Pupil Progression Plans

The development of pupil progression plans for each parish really started to cast the anticipated light on the minimum competency testing effort (later renamed Basic Skills Testing). The State Board plans, through guidelines from the Department, directed each LEA to establish written policy relating to the promotion decision processes. The law assured that the LEA guidelines required extensive input from the educational and parental community of each parish. It further stated that, though other factors were to be considered, the results of the student's performance on the basic skills test were to be the principal criteria in the promotion decision. The plan was to further detail the LEA plan for remediation. Figure 4 is a table of contents illustrative of the extensive pupil progression plans. For more than a year, pupil progression plans became the hottest educational issue in Louisiana. Painfully, perhaps, our LEAs used these plans to develop the broad educational programs necessary to face the MCT. When the pupil progression plans were taken before the State Board for approval, the meeting was long, heated, and had extensive citizen input.

FIGURE 3

COURSE CONTENT

Second Grade

Curriculum Outline	Performance Objectives	Activity Page Number
II. Numeration		
A. Place Value	A. To develop an understanding of place value, the student will be able to:	
	***1. Group concrete and semi-concrete objects in tens.	291
	***2. Recognize place value for ones, tens.	287
	*3. Recognize place value through hundreds.	287
	4. Recognize place value through thousands.	287
B. Counting and Writing	B. To exhibit proficiency in counting and writing numbers, the student will be able to:	
	***1. Count to one hundred by ones, twos, fives and tens.	250
	***2. Write to one hundred by ones, fives and tens.	271
	**3. Write to one hundred by twos.	271
	*4. Read and write numbers through one thousand.	282

23

CONTENT: Numeration

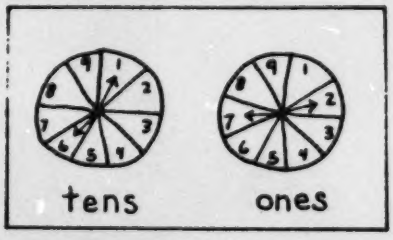
OBJECTIVE: The student will be able to recognize place value:

(1)	ones and tens	1-2	*2
(2)	through hundreds	2-3	*3
(3)	through thousands	3-4	*4
(4)	through hundred thousands	4-5	*5

ACTIVITIES

1. Play a card game with two stacks of small cards, expanded numerals for 10-30 in one stack and the two-digit numerals 10-30 in another stack. Each player may be given several expanded numeral cards and in turn draw a two-digit numeral. Each time the player gets a match, the player lays down the two matching cards. The player to discard all the cards first wins. If both children have unmatched cards, shuffle the discard pile, and reuse. Cards can be made in attractive shapes (fish, flowers, etc.).

2. See diagram below. Spin both spinners and have the children write on scratch paper the two-digit numeral for the number shown by the spinners. Have a child write the two-digit numerals on the board and have another child read the numeral aloud and tell how many tens and how many ones. (Can adapt to three spinners to include 100's place.)



3. "I Am Thinking of a Number" may be played with tens and ones. The child who is "it" might say, "I am thinking of 2 tens plus 4 ones." Another child writes or shows the numeral card for the two-digit numeral or 24 in this case. If the child is correct, that child becomes "it."

FIGURE 4

PUPIL PROGRESSION PLANS

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Compensatory/Remedial Education

Since the law requires compensatory/remedial education, extensive plans for those programs are under way. While remedial education is not crucial to the exploration of basic skills testing issue, it certainly is an important educational outcome that can't be ignored. As an indication that we're taking the problem of remediation seriously, it should be noted that 2.1 million dollars of state funds have been allocated for the 1982 summer program. Four and one-half million for the 1982-83 school year program and 2.4 million for the 1983 summer program at this point seem assured. Louisiana is extremely cognizant of its responsibility to student remedial and compensatory education. The chief state school officer has repeatedly stated that he will no longer support the program if remedial funds are not forthcoming in legislative budgets.

Parental Involvement

A priority issue in the Department has been parental awareness and involvement in basic skills testing. A series of television programs and extensive newspaper and radio coverage have been part of this campaign. Department publications explaining the program have been numerous, and illustrations are attached. By far the most effective and successful program of parental involvement has been our Calendars of Skills, presently distributed to all families with students in grades one, two, or three. Figure 5 is a page illustrative of those calendars. As you can see, a daily skill development activity is suggested for the student. Though not original with Louisiana, these were an overwhelming success. They're our free "best sellers." The Department has printed and distributed at least a quarter of a million of these.

FIGURE 5

CALENDARS OF SKILLS

FEBRUARY — GRADE 2 — 1982

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 Add Have your child solve this number puzzle. □ = 3 □ ★ 🐐 🐐 = 4 + □ ★ = 7	**2** Have your child guess whether or not the ground hog will see his shadow. GROUND HOG DAY	**3** Main Idea Have your child write these words in a way that helps show their meaning: tall, fat, skinny, wavy, small. WAVY	**4** Sequence Have your child act out in order what he or she does to get ready for school in the morning. (get out of bed, get dressed, etc.).	**5** Place Value Have your child copy 4 numbers from grocery ads and write them as below. (25 = 20 + 5)	**6** On a trip to the grocery store, have your child point out all the things that are red.
7 Have your child make his or her own mailbox using a shoebox and decorate for Valentine's Day.	**8** Word Meanings From newspapers and magazines, have your child cut words and pictures that have special meaning during February. (heart, George Washington)	**9** Calendar Have your child find and circle these dates on the calendar: Valentine's Day (Feb. 14), Washington's Birthday (Feb. 22); Lincoln's Birthday (Feb. 12).	**10** Cut out 10 heart shapes. Write a word from the Harris-Jacobson List* on each heart shape. Have your child practice the words.	**11** Subtract Have your child subtract the date of Valentine's Day from the number of days in February.	**12** Have your child add the dates of Washington's (Feb. 22) and Lincoln's (Feb. 12) birthdays. LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY	**13** Read a story to your child and discuss with him or her whether or not the story could have really happened.
14 VALENTINE'S DAY 	**15** Time Fold a piece of paper into 3 sections. Let your child label the sections "morning," "noon" and "night." Then, have him list activities he does at these times.	**16** Write Numerals Have your child write the numerals 1-100 around the edge of a sheet of newspaper.	**17** Problem Solving Have your child solve this problem: There are 54 carrots in the garden. The Carrot-Grabber ate 2. How many are left?	**18** Time Have your child look in the TV section of the newspaper and find a show that starts at 8:00.	**19** Help your child do number sentences by using objects. Ex: 2 balls + 3 balls = 5 balls. Let the child rearrange the balls to make other number sentences.	**20** Make Smiley Pancakes for Saturday breakfast. Have your child help by making eyes and mouth with butter.
21 Number Series Read this number series to your child and have him or her clap when you say a number that does not belong: 23, 24, 25, 29, 26.	**22** WASHINGTON'S BIRTHDAY Call out the ages of family members and have your child write the numerals for each.	**23** Consonants Have your child clap every time he or she hears a word that begins with /w/. Say: Wacky Willie went to the window to watch Wanda with her wagon.	**24** Vowels Label 2 cups, 1 with "long i," 1 with "long e." Have your child draw a picture for each of these words: *bike, five, feet, sheet*. Have your child put each picture in the correct cup.	**25** Symbols Ask your child to write for you the symbols for addition (+), subtraction (−), and equals to (=). Have him show you he knows how to use these symbols in several math problems.	**26** Help your child do the following addition problem. 57 +32	**27** Have your child compare himself or herself to a good friend and tell how they are alike and how they are different.
28 Ask your child what job he or she thinks he or she would like to have sometime. Have your child dramatize a person working at that job.	SHARE YOUR TIME with YOUR CHILD. 					

* PROVIDED AT THE BACK OF THE CALENDAR

NOTE: The Louisiana State Dept. of Education gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the Duval County Florida Schools for selected materials in this calendar

A Conclusion Becomes the Introduction

All this leads up to the major issue of these related papers--the basic skills testing program in Louisiana. The sequence of this development is present in Figure 6. Note that as Basic Skills Tests are phased in, State Assessment is shown as phased out. More recent decisions have been reached that will move state assessment into the nonbasic skills areas, such as science and social studies, rather than phase out the program. This change has long been the desire of the curriculum specialists in these areas.

No issue now preys stronger on our minds than how we keep the minimum standards from becoming the maximum goals, or the total program. Repeatedly, LEAs are encouraged to strive for maximum goals and total programs. The SEA establishes minimum standards, the LEAs set maximum goals, and the local school fits these into programs that meet their students' unique needs. LEA testing programs should examine higher order skills. In establishing, implementing, and assuring minimum standards, the Department has a leadership responsibility to assure that maximum goals and unique needs are constantly and consistently emphasized and reinforced within our LEAs. The long term goal of striving for maximum goals has not at all disappeared in Louisiana, but a quality assurance program of mastery of minimum standards is a more immediate goal.

Louisiana has taken strong aggressive steps toward assuring higher quality education for its students. A thoughtful, well-planned, comprehensive program is being slowly and carefully developed. In this program basic skills testing and the establishment of mastery standards are key components. Great care has been taken to assure

FIGURE 6

DEVELOPMENT OF BASIC SKILLS TESTING PROGRAM

LOUISIANA LITERACY ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

STATE ASSESSMENT (ACT 621)

1979-80	1980-81	1981-82	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
4-8-11	3-7-10	7-10	7-10	7-10	7-10
READING	READING	READING	READING	READING	READING
MATHEMATICS	WRITING	WRITING	WRITING	WRITING	WRITING
WRITING	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS	MATHEMATICS

BASIC SKILLS TESTING (ACT 750)

LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATHEMATICS

DEVELOP	PILOT	IMPLEMENT	IMPLEMENT	IMPLEMENT	IMPLEMENT
2ND	2ND	2ND	2ND AND 3RD	2ND, 3RD, AND 4TH	2ND, 3RD, 4TH, AND 5TH
	DEVELOP	PILOT	PILOT	PILOT	PILOT
	3RD AND 4TH	3RD AND 4TH	5TH	6TH	7TH
		DEVELOP	DEVELOP	DEVELOP	DEVELOP
		5TH	6TH	7TH	8TH

that testing is not the only thing, but is instead a part of a comprehensive design.